

# JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

## TRUTH IN LOVE

### Bolton: Dream Beyond Your Reach!

By Parris J. Baker  
October 2023

*Editor's note: U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Edward L. Bolton, Jr., Ret. will come home to Erie to accept the Jefferson's highest honor, the Thomas B. Hagen Dignitas Award, at Global Summit XV on Friday, Nov. 10 at Gannon University's Waldron Campus Center, 124 W. Seventh St. He will speak on a wide range of subjects in a program that begins at 7:30 p.m. For more information or to register, go to [JESerie.org](http://JESerie.org) or call 814.459.8000.*



When told of the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth, his future disciple Nathaniel queried, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” To be referred to as a Nazarene was a “shonuff” put down. Sometimes successful individuals native to Erie are viewed in a similar way. “Can anything good from Erie?” Put another way, how does a “brother”<sup>[1]</sup> from the “hood” in the small metropolitan city of Erie,<sup>[2]</sup> Pennsylvania, ascend to the military rank of major general?

“Dream beyond your reach!” These are the empowering words of encouragement and vision that Maj. Gen. Edward “Ed” L. Bolton, Jr. heard early and often from his mother. And that’s exactly what Ed Jr. did! He dreamed beyond his reach.

Growing up in a two-parent family, his dad Edward L. and mom Louise D. Harris Bolton remained married for 55 years, were guided by Christian values that offered instructions on how to live well and love, not judge, others. These were his parents’ core values, along with stressing the importance of challenging work, which shaped the character of their children.

“I learned to be an independent thinker early in my life,” the now retired Ed Bolton, Jr. noted. “I spent my free time at the YMCA, with the Boy Scouts and being involved in various youth church groups.” It was in those community spaces where the future Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget of the Air Force for Financial Management, responsible for a \$110 billion budget, learned leadership skills, how to succeed in a diverse environment, and how to recognize and pursue opportunities. “I have been leading others since I was seven or eight years old,” he told me. “Once I became motivated to succeed, I was quite confident that I could out work or outthink everyone around me.” It’s no doubt a character trait Ed Jr. learned from watching his father.

Eddie L. Sr. was born in Leaf, Mississippi, in 1922. At maybe two or three years old, Ed Jr. recalled, his father contracted polio and was unable to walk early in his life. He eventually overcame his disabilities and became strong enough to help support the family by picking cotton. Eddie Sr. learned early to be extremely self-reliant, resilient, and developed a strong work ethic – those essential “thriving” skills that he would later pass on to his children.

Ed Jr. did not spend a great deal of time directly with his father. “Like most Black men in those days, my father worked all the time,” he explained. “Though he was not always physically present, my dad had a special place and importance in my life. Seldom did he attend sporting, scouting or church events, or just spend time with us. The environment demanded hard work and the examples he set, of how to meet those demands, which contributed so much to my eventual success.”

Ed Jr. Remembers it well. “When he was laid off from G.E. (General Electric), my father took on three jobs. He started a janitorial service, he was a ‘mail boy’ (yes, that is what they called him) at the Union Bank, and he also sold hair products door to door. I was never bothered by his physical absence because when he was working, I knew we (his wife and seven children – five children and two stepchildren<sup>[3]</sup>) would have a roof over our heads, clothes on our backs and food on our table,” Ed Jr told me. Mr. Edward L. Bolton, Sr. was known and revered throughout the community for his passion and love for his family. During our discussions, Ed and I discovered that his father Eddie Sr. and my father Willie were best friends, both born in Mississippi (Leaf and Laurel, respectively). Each man traveled with their families to Erie during the Great Northern Migration (read “The Warmth of Other Suns,” by Isabel Wilkeson<sup>[4]</sup>) in search of work and opportunity. Both men worked at G.E., attended Second Baptist Missionary Baptist Church, and, for a time, lived in the same neighborhood, only blocks away from each other. Both men were also determined to move their families to better neighborhoods, safer communities, and better schools with the hope that those moves would translate into better-quality education and greater opportunities.

“When I was eight, my family moved to Brandes Street in Erie,” Ed Jr. said. “In our new neighborhood, we attended Lincoln Elementary School. Dad’s hard work made sure we had the basics to live. Our mother, Louise, insisted on music lessons, community involvement, and other activities that exposed us to culture, diversity and made us more well-rounded citizens. After we graduated from elementary school, we met some of the same kids (from the old neighborhood) at Wilson Junior High and Academy High School, but by then we (siblings) were firmly on a path away from the crime and drugs that trapped so many of our friends from our early years.”

After high school Ed Jr. met another important person who had a tremendous impact on his life, Eddie Miles. After graduating from Academy High and a failed attempt at college at Edinboro, Ed Jr. was sent to live with his sister Jewell and her husband Eddie Miles because he did not have a plan for his future. A captain in the Air Force when Ed Jr. met him, Miles soon became his mentor and role model. That relationship helped set the stage for all of Ed’s future successes.

“For the first time, I was in daily contact with a college educated, poised, and successful professional who was Black like me – someone who went to work in a coat and tie,” Ed Jr. told me. “I still remember the first time he took me to a restaurant and told me I could order whatever I wanted. I was shocked because I was accustomed to having someone order for me, ordering only what we could afford.”

In 1976, after living with Eddie Miles and Jewell Miles for six months, Ed Bolton, Jr. enlisted in the Air Force and reported to Basic Training in September 1976. When he left Erie, Ed Jr. possessed the skills and aptitude necessary to succeed, but these talents and abilities were hidden within him. “The Air Force helped me discover my purpose,” he said.

Ed Jr. progressed quickly through the ranks, outpacing his peers for advancement by two to three years, each time he was promoted.<sup>[5]</sup> However, his military success came at a heavy price. Divorce. Ed has been in a relationship with Dr. Neda Mojaverian for seven years.

After completing his military career, serving as a senior executive at the Federal Aviation Administration and working as a senior vice president at a defense contractor, Maj. Gen. Bolton fully retired in 2019. In May 2020, however, as he watched the worldwide mobilization of Black Lives Matter, following the murder of George Floyd, Ed recognized this moment was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to leverage shared empathy for good. Capturing the Kairos moment, in June 2020, he accepted an opportunity to serve as a senior adviser to corporate officer-level executives on topics related to Diversity, Equity, and

Inclusion. His first efforts were within a single company, but, in 2022, the activities expanded to over 30 aerospace companies. This dedication to providing S.T.E.M. education and employment opportunities to marginalized communities brings him full circle to things he learned during his youth in Erie, Pennsylvania.

The final question: To young African Americans, what advice would you give them?

- The most important foundational component of career success is based **on doing the best you can at your current job** ... that is from my father ... work hard, love your family, offer no excuses, outwork your peers!
- Your goals and **dreams should extend beyond what people might think is realistic for you.** I did not have a strong math background, but, after two years of night classes while working full time, I was competitively selected for an Air Force fellowship that resulted in my completing an electrical engineering degree and Officers Training School ... That's from my mother, whose dreams led my siblings and me to a better neighborhood, better schools, and bigger futures.
- The most successful people can identify and address problems and opportunities more quickly and more effectively than others. It is important to be able to **"look ahead" and know what to do as the environment changes.** I first saw that in Eddie Miles as he tried to navigate a rapidly changing Air Force.
- Finally, the most important skill of all is leadership. **It is the leaders who make change happen, for better or worse.** That is something that I started learning in Erie, built on in the Air Force, and am continuing to learn over the years.

[1] A *brother* is a black colloquialism to connote friendship among African American males. It is a putative relationship, not by a blood connection but a spiritual one. Someone you love a respect, a role model.

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=brother>

[2] Comen, E, & Sauter, M.B., (2017). 24/7 Wall St. Special Report: The Worst Cities for Black Americans. No major metropolitan area has greater racial inequalities across major social and economic outcome measures than Erie, Pennsylvania. An astounding 47% of the Black population lives at or below the national poverty line, twice the already alarming national poverty rate for Black Americans of 23.9%, and more than four times the white poverty rate in Erie of 11.9%. <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2017/11/03/the-worst-cities-for-black-americans-2/3/>

[3] The Bolton siblings: Jewell Bailey, James R. Bailey, Sr., Edward L Bolton, Jr., Rodney B. Bolton; Anita Bolton Deryl A. Bolton; Karen J. Bolton.

[4] Wilkerson, I. (2010). The warmth of other suns. The epic story of America's great migration. New York: Random House.

[5] The achievements of Major General Edward L. Bolton, Jr. is laudable. You can read about his incredible career ascent while in the Air Force at the following locations:

Air Force: <https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Biographies/Display/Article/108015/edward-l-bolton-jr/>

Aerospace: <https://aerospace.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Bolton-bio.pdf>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Parris J. Baker is an Associate Professor at Gannon University, where he is the Social Work, Mortuary Science and Gerontology Program Director. An alumnus of Gannon, Baker received his graduate degree from Case Western Reserve University, Jack, Joseph, & Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences and his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work. Presently, Baker serves as the Senior Pastor of Believers International Worship Center, Inc. He is married and has five children.



Dr. Baker can be reached at: [baker002@gannon.edu](mailto:baker002@gannon.edu).

[Subscribe to JES Publications Emails!](#)

[Subscribe to Book Notes Emails!](#)

## In Case You Missed It

[The Wider World | Geopolitical Fallout Follows Outbreak of War in Israel](#) written by President of DC Analytics **Diane Chido**

[Truth in Love | Celebremos Nuestro Futuro Valioso \(We Celebrate Our Valuable Future\)](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence  
**Dr. Parris J. Baker**

[Be Well | Are you Making Some of These Common Health Blunders?](#) written by health and wellness expert **Debbie DeAngelo**

[Book Notes #162 | Global Summit “Week Two”: A look at AI and the human future, ‘What’s Wrong with the Boys?’ and A 5-time Jeopardy Champion](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence  
**Dr. Andrew Roth**

[Color Television: It’ll Never Catch On](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. David Frew**

Jefferson Educational Society | [jeserie.org](http://jeserie.org)

